

Interview with Michael Somers, Apr. 16, 1986

Mike: Do you want to be candid on the tape.

Allen: I want to be candid on the tape. I will be sensitive on the writing.

Mike: O.K. because there is the episode with Dolan.

Allen: I have several comments on that and I'm only going to do a little more detail but I want candidness on the tape and then in the writing, there I will become sensitive.

Mike: Because I don't really know, I've always kind of, the only question you ever asked me outright and I give an honest answer, he told me he was on his honor (?) I've maintained pretty quiet and I'm sure you were apprised of it somewhere along the line but I think it is such a sensitive issue because of the - I think the school was afraid I was a teacher who had had training from Fran in elementary class but I think he had pretty decent job in teaching. He was a very talented guy, there's no doubt about it in my mind, but I think that they feel that people that got F's, this became generally known, I don't think it was so much to protect Fran, but people who got F's come back and say, how the hell with a guy with no degrees give me an F. I think the school was in kind of a sticky position.

(He's talking to someone about the interview to someone)

Allen: This is Wednesday, the 16th of April and I'm talking with Michael Eugene Somers.

Allen: Mike, when did you first come to the university as a student?

Mike: I first came in the fall of 1946 as a freshman and I eventually graduated

Allen: the fall of 46?

Mike: The fall of 46, spring of 47. And then I graduated in 51. And actually I never went through the graduation exercises. I was called into the Army in April and they sent my diploma to me when I was overseas in Germany, so I'm not really sure, I have my diploma but I'm not sure I graduated. And I then was in the service for a couple of years and earned my master's degree at Clark in 1955, and then I came back here. Bill Everett, the chairman, asked me to come back. I came back and took a position

here as an instructor in 1955-56, academic year, and I've just been here ever since. Actually, it's kind of interesting. I had, I feel, six more lectures and my career is essentially over here at the university, this semester. I'm on part time, it will be 31 or 32 years here, but in any event I stayed at the university until 64, and 1964 I got on the National Science Foundation fellowship grant to Clark up in Worcester, and returned there and finished my doctorate up. I was in residence there two years and one year back here teaching and finishing up my thesis, and I finished my PHD in 69, no 67. Came back here for a couple of years as a temporary acting chairman in 1969-70 and then became the chairman in 1970 and was the chairman up until 1984-85. I retired from the chair and in the Spring of 85 went back to part time teaching and my retirement. I have a sabbatical coming up next year and then an early retirement marked, hoping to come back possibly teaching once course a year in the history of Biology. It is appropriate now that I'm a part of your history, teaching that course on an emeritus basis. Now this is basically the chronology of my time here.

Allen: Why did you stay so long here?

Mike: Well, I like to think its the university and so forth. Maaybe it's cause I couldn't go any where else, I don't know. Teaching was my love. I love teaching and I always felt that the university was an outstanding teaching institution, and we had a sort of pioneer spirit in the early days. We were building something and I think that everybody was, this was engendered into the faculty of that day and this spirit just held, just enjoyed it. Then you suddenly find, after a certain number of years, you've become an institution and you have a certain niche that you occupy and a certain role that you play, so to speak, with the students. It keeps you young, it keeps you going and as I mentioned it at my dinner, I would never change a day. I've had other opportunities but my life, I feel, is tied to Biology here at the university.

Allen: This is an attitude that I have on tape from many of the old timers. Why did we loose that?

Mike: I don't know, but I think the instant that the faculty and the administration looked at the university as a business, I think this develops with the union and so forth and so on, and we/they type of philosophy that develops in business where it wasn't. I hate to be telling old Army stories, so to speak, but in the early days it was a "we", faculty didn't think the administration was out to stick them and vice-versa and the students were in the class room and faculty taught and administrators raised money, and so forth and so on, and we didn't have this interchange which I think is just detrimental. You know, students on faculty committees, faculty on administrative committees and all that stuff back and forth, to the exclusion of the idea that

of the question of the university. I think it is the part of the thing. We were teachers first and this was it.

Allen: Did the change have anything to do with the increased emphasis on research?

Mkke: Well, I don't really think that even existed, to be honest with you. This was parroted about, we got to do this and we got to have research and so on, but in the sciences anyway, unless you are going to come forward with a hard buck, you can't expect somebody to do any kind of significant research if you are not going to provide the funding for equipment and traditionally the university just has failed, and I think on the part of the Biology Dept. the failure during the Sputnik years, to really reach for grants, was a problem we kind of live with, because by the time we started to try and approach this thing, to go out and get equipment, it was the days, the gravy days, the martini days, of grantsmanship was over and the buck was tough. The university, though parroting the fact that there should be research, now I can't speak in the humanities and the social sciences, what kind of pressure to write was exerted, but certainly there was no pressure exerted on the faculty in the sciences. As a matter of fact, it was fine if we went out and could get the grants or do research, I think the research impetus came, was revitalized when the graduate program came back in again, but there never has been in the sciences, a real emphasis on research other than supporting student research.

Aallen: Bill Everett was the chairman when you were a student and you worked under him for a time. Tell us about Bill Everett.

Mike: Well, the best thing I can say is Bill was a southern gentleman, he was a quiet, soft spoken fellow with a very good heart, certainly he loved students. His main problem, I think. over the years, had just been beaten by lack of funding and so forth, he came, I guess, in the early 30ths and I think he had one other science, one other Biology teacher with him, his name was Ballou or something like this, and I think there was one other fellow, then Jeffries came because I know in 46 they had hired a fellow by the name of Bob Akers who was there a couple of years, but Jeffries, I think was the son of the Supt. of Schools here in Bridgeport, had a degree in Parasitology, but Bill basically carried the department, and as I say, he was a traditionalist, he had been trained in what were then traditional areas of Biology and Vertebrate Zoology, and so forth and so on. A very, very fine gentleman, I never heard, I don't know of Bill every lying to anyone, a very fine, very real southern gentleman, this is what I think if it, Bill. Had some real tragedies in his family, of course, but still I look back on him with fondness, it is interesting because I certainly worked with Bill over many years, but never had Bill for a course. I was one of the funny, I never ended up having Bill, and yet I worked very closely with

him over the four years, was student assistant there, but I never had him. I know students who did, and what the reasons were, believe it or not, one of them was the class was so crowded, so certainly, interesting when you look at the situation today, but the classes were so crowded, being one of the students who wanted to major in invertebrate Zoo, I was one of the students that didn't get the course, which was kind of a strange thing, so I really never had Bill. But I worked, as I say, very closely with him. I know that he was a very organized, very detailed kind of an individual, and I don't think he was really considered by students, I can't really say, except what the reputation was. He intended to be very, very detailed and picayune, if you will, he was one of the people that students used to have, horrified because he used to take off points misspellings and things like this, which was kind of typical of that period of time and very strict, moral code that he adhered to. As of matter of fact, it is interesting, we had a student that became involved in a seduction, and told the young lady that they were getting married and faked the marriage and everything else, and I was a student here and Bill refused to let the student graduate as a Biology major, because he thought he was not morally fit, which is kind of an interesting situation.

Allen: That used to be a part of regulation.

Mike: Of course it was, yes, that's what I'm saying but I think is probably listed but you know right now, everyone is afraid of getting sued. This was, and he actually voted, this happened when I was here as, in the interim, when I came back on the faculty when Bill was still alive, which I can't remember exactly how long. We were over in Fones for a few years and then we came over here. Bill had had the heart attack and he had passed away, but I look back on Bill, as many times I've gone over to his home, Elsie, his wife, and so forth, and his son. What happened to his son here, but he used to come back and visit, you know, after he got his discharge from the service, it is just really sad, I don't know where he is now.

Allen: I run into him every now and then and he (?)

Mike: He stops cause he's got two or three people left that he knows, Hugo and myself.

Allen: Alright, what other teachers did you have as an undergraduate?

Mike: Well, I'm trying to think. Certainly I had in the Biology Dept., let's start there. I had Chick Spiltoir, of course, who retired a couple of years ago, teaching Botany, and I had Bob Akers. Bill Everett had given up the General Zo, they had to usually, Bill I think taught everything in the whole Dept. at one time, and the increase in student numbers was just so horrendous

that they had to bring in. I remember at that time up there, the university was basically three buildings and Bassick high school classrooms, we had the little theatre and that's where I had General Zoo with Bob Akers, and, who was basically a physiologist, a very, very nice guy, and then the Little Theatre was called South Hall, and all I can remember about South Hall was that every time the classes changed the whole building used to shake cause it was a three story house and little classrooms.

Allen: It had been a dormitory.

Mike: Is that what it had been, yea, it was just awful and we called it South Hall, and then there was the main building and I can remember the main building. You know what I remember about the main building, just unbelievable crowding, and the lines. There was a cafeteria. You could never get in to sit there. You know, to the right as you come in the main door, and down at the end, there was a hall off the cafeteria that was the book store and I can remember in '46 being there and the line for the book store and the corridor was so thin that you couldn't get two people side by side in there, and people were going to buy books and then turn around and literally fight to get out, plus I think you spent an hour or two hours in the line, the lines were just horrendous, and at that time period I remember not, in my freshman year, but I remember Dean Scurr, a very, very lovely lady from Minnesota, and a purist in the terms of academics but a very, very lovely lady, specializing, I think, in English Lit. No, that was Rose Davis. Miss Davis, Rose Davis, for American Lit. and I think, I used to think of him as Ichabod Crane, red headed, Kearns, red headed, I had him for American Lit, John Kearns and a very interesting guy, but he was the epitomy. I think I had him for Amer. Lit. He was describing Ichabod Crane and he was tall, thin, a hooked nose and red hair, and he looked just like Ichabod Crane. I always remember that. In the languages, of course, I had a very interesting guy, Eric Marcus, who I had considerable experience with, a multiple of experiences, but I remember him as really outstanding teacher, a very, very interesting guy, teaching German; and let's see, in the History Dept. we had yourself, and as I've said before, and I'm not saying this cause you are right in front of me, I consider one of the best teachers that I ever had. As a matter of fact I remember my first hearing your name from a student who was taking the course with Bill Everett and he said the only time in his life that he can remember taking lectures simultaneously in two classes. Apparently you were on the opposite side of the wall from Bill Everett and he speaks in a very low, southern and you were on the opposite side shouting, something going on and he said he could take the notes, two classes at once, but that was quite a lab. I remember that lab, Zoology lab was upstairs over the Chemistry, and poor Bill, every summer, when he opened the windows, the fumes from the Chemistry would come up and kill all his plants on the ledge up above the Chemistry Dept. But,

let's see now, we covered English, History, there was yourself and there was Ralph Pickett of course, a real gentleman. It's funny, Ralph didn't have a good reputation as a lecturer. He was considered very dry. I found him very ordered. Another one whom I considered outstanding as a lecturer, was Philoon, I can't remember his first name, Thurmond. As a matter of fact, it was interesting, I read an article about him, he passed away and he became quite intersted in, I guess, the history of warfare, I'm not quite sure of where he was, George Washington, Franklin-Marshall. He became, I guess, quite an authority, but he was a facinating lecturer. I always remember him saying, I don't remember what I had him for. Did they offer a course in Greek and Roman History?

Allen: Yes

Mike: This is what it seemed to me, but anyway,

Allen: He began as a Latinist

Mike: Yes, he was saying he had taken a PHD in Latin and then he took a PHD in History, and he was telling the recruiting officer this when he was going into the service. The man asked him, what do you have as experience? Well, I have a PHD in Latin and Greek, I think it was, but anyway and also a PHD in Ancient History. So he said without even hesitating, this fellow said, X-Ray Technician, so he said he spent the war as an X-ray technician. He was a very, very interesting guy. And who the devil else, what other areas. We didn't have that music. I never had anybody in the music dept. I had Bill Banks for speech and I don't remember. My memory has to be jogged but I remember Bill Banks, a very, very nice guy. It was interesting because when I came back later, I was the newest chairman and Bill Banks came in after me as a chairman, and everybody else there had about half the time we did and we had the two lowest salaries which always kind of intrigued me, because apparently the chairman that came in when Lee Miles was here were all given an incentive salaries, while we wern't given anything at all, in just after ten, fifteen years we were still at the low end of the salary scale.

Allen: I remember that very well. We'll come back to that later. Did you know Jim Halsey?

Mike: I'll tell you Jim Halsey was in administration. In those days as students as you know, like in the Army, which what you did, you stayed away. My experience was with actually, with Littlefield.

Allen: What can you tell us about Henry?

Mike: Well, I've always considered Henry as really one of the

strongest points in the history of the university. I think he was just an outstanding individual. I thought one of the saddest things is what happened in the 60's and so forth and so on, when all the yapping about change, tearing this down without any constructive, what was going to replace, or anything else. All these things were just a sad experience; but in any event, Henry, to me, he was a unique character. My initial experience with him he thought this was hilarious. I told him about it years later when I come into his office and he was sitting there and he said, "Well, Mr. Somers, have you, we're interested in hiring you on the faculty in Biology:, and, of course, in those days, just out of graduate school, every one thought of himself as a kind of a specialist. and he said, "Well, can you teach, starting with Biology 101 or whatever it was", and went right through the entire catalog, asking me if I could teach every single course that was listed in the catalog, and I said "yes I could," to one and no I couldn't to Botany, and no I didn't think I could to Comparative Anatomy, and yes I could to (?), and so forth and so on, and then he said to me, "Well, Mike, what do you of as a salary?" Of course, Henry was quite interested in salaries. In the meantime, unbeknown to Henry, Bill Everett had come to me previously and said, "Now look", he said, "when you go in there today", and by the way Bill called me Gene, everybody else, I used the name Mike and Gene, my name is Michael Eugene but I appear as both

Allen: I go both ways with you too.

Mike: That's what I'm saying, it's funny. I can almost tell by what people call me when they knew me. The older people usually call me Gene, the newer people call me Mike, you know. But in any event, "Gene", he said, "I know it's big", he said, "but I think if you hold out", he said, "you go there and get \$3,200". That was for nine months plus whatever hell else they wanted and you worked all summer just to get ready so he said, "I think if you go in, you can get \$3,200, try to hold for that". So I said o.k. and I went into Littlefield and I said, "well, Mr. Littlefield, I just couldn't come for less than \$3,200", so he looked at me and said, "well all right, Mr. Somers, we'll go with the \$3,200" and then he reached down with a pencil and he lined out \$3,400 and wrote in \$3,200. And that was my introduction to Henry Littlefield.

Allen: I have a similar story to that which I won't repeat.

Mike: Actually, he was an Historian, I guess.

Allen: His PHD was in education.

Mike: Was it? I knew that he wrote a little

Allen: He wrote an outline

Mike: Published by Littlefield publication

Allen: Some of his money comes from that publishing, Littlefield/Adams.

Mike: A very interesting guy. I remember one year, he also stopped me and he said to me, "Mike, I'm not surprised about the things that go on here at the university". He said, "but the other day, I saw something that surprised me". He stopped me at one of dinners, or something that we had and he said to me, "I have to tell you", and of course, you know Henry loved student pranks as long as they weren't going to damage university property. He had a really good sense of humor. He said, "I saw something I couldn't believe. I was standing by the window and I looked out, and I saw a group of students going by and I subsequently found out that this was a Biology class going on a field trip". He said, "I want to tell you, I thought this was really superb, but what I couldn't understand was, there were four students carrying a stretcher with a chair, and you were sitting in it with a pith helmet on your head and," he said, "I looked and I said, "I've seen strange things here at the university". This day the kids wanted to go out on a field trip or something, and we went down the beach, and so I said fine, but the only way I go is in a Haida (?), so they, we had these old Army stretchers around the place, and we go these stretchers and they put these two things, of course, I was a hell of a lot thinner in those days, now it would take eight of them instead of four to get me aboard, and they put this thing together and they had a pith helmet, which by the way I used for about ten years on every field trip, and so I sat in this chair, with the pith helmet on, and they lifted me up and off we went down to Seaside Park on a field trip. And he still remembers, and we laugh. We used to send, I was a charter member of a fraternity, UBS fraternity, and one of our stunts in the beginning was, we had the paddles. The kids had to make their own paddles, and so I said o.k. I was now on the faculty, faculty advisor, and so I said I have to have the biggest paddle. We have to get an oar and you have to take the end of the oar and cut this down, and make a paddle out of this thing and you bring it to me, and I said I want a little square put right in the center of the paddle, and I want the Mayor of Bridgeport to sign it, and I said I want Pres. Littlefield, who was the president at that time, to sign this thing in this little square, and Henry called me to tell me that the fellow had come in and I said, give him a hard time. I said you have to give these people a hard time, and he signed it and the kid shallacked it and brought it to me. I still have that thing sitting around somewhere at home, but kind of interesting but it was an old paddle that they converted for my paddle, but as I say, the organization still goes now, the fraternity is still going here which is kind of interesting.

Allen: Any other good Littlefield stories?

Mike: This is about it. I can remember on Littlefield. He was an interesting individual. I've always felt that if you approached him rationally, with reason. I can remember an episode with Fran Dolan that we just desperately had to have some new microscopes. The microscopes we had, by the way, had been purchased from the Navy as surplus with Fones Hall, along with the chairs, the phones and the autoclaves, we got these microscopes. By the way, the microscopes we got then, this was in 1945-46, the end of the war, were replaced in 1984. The scopes were moved around and finally used with a little non major Biology course, but they finally went and I shed a tear when I said goodbye to them. But I went to Henry and I said, "Look, what I want to do is, we have right now 18 microscopes in this room when you come over here. I said I can fill this laboratory with 18 kids for each lab section, but I said what I want is to buy six more microscopes, because Fran told me, go over, but you are never going to get anything from him. I said I want to get six microscopes and then I can raise the number of students in that lab section to 24, because right now we're running between two sections. here we are 10 in one and 10 in the other and it is ridiculous, we'll run one section of 24 and I said this is going to save because were going to useand he said, buy them. That's all he said. This is just an example and I think you were reasonable and you said this thing and you presented it to him, and he could see how he could save 50 cents or more, he'd do it. I never, never had any problem with him. Jim, I didn't really know that well. I had very, very little to do with him. I played on the Chess team with his son, a very strong Chess player, but I didn't really have much to do with him. I can remember student-wise, what I thought was one of the fine things was the circus dance that we used to have, and I think this was an outstanding thing. I was really upset to see that this thing kind of died. What they had were booths, and they had side shows, and each of the different organizations on campus, the Greek societies were much stronger in those days than they are now, and the Biology Society, which I was in, we each had a little booth and we had a side show with snake charmers. Joan Voight, she is now a dentist, and Dick Casper, another fellow in it, he is now a dentist, and myself. John Barrett who is just retiring now, he got his degree with Muller at Indiana in Genetics, he is retiring from academics. Bob Marak, who is just retiring after 30 years in the fisheries or did retire. So it was an interesting group of people. These people did the side show, and unfortunately we had our scrapbook with all this pictures right from the beginning, and when I went up to Clark in 64, 65 so forth, something happened and it just disappeared. We still don't know what happened to it. And that was really sad. I had kept the scrapbook with all these pictures starting with the Bio Society, year by year, which went down the drain.

Allen: O.K. Doc Ropp

Mike: well, Ropp, I have tremendous amount of respect for Clarence. I think that he had a very strong sense of what the academics and the College of Arts and Sciences should be. And he was very faithful and very honest too. I don't agree with many of the things that he put forth. For instance, but, I can understand why -

Allen: Such as?

Mike: Well, the rigidity. He had a tremendous amount of rigidity in courses. If you couldn't equate a course to a certain number of credit hours, forget it. Prime example. I had an opportunity to get a summer residence that belonged to the governor of New Hampshire. It was actually a hunting lodge on Lake Carlton in New Hampshire, and I wanted to offer a course in the summer for two weeks, where myself and a group of six students, no girls of course, in those days, you didn't do this, and the six or seven of us were going up there and actually live on this lake in this cabin, and do a field ecology, kind of course, but even though I tried to tell him that this, there is nothing else you can do there but Biology for eight or ten hours a day, he couldn't equate that to the number of credit hours, and so forth and so on, and so this course was not accepted and I think this was too rigid. I think that the insistence that everybody had to have 8 grades was also an abomination in many ways.

Allen: Do you recall arguments in the faculty over getting credit for certain skills courses, such as typewriting?

Mike: No, I don't remember. I think that this argument was being fought while I was a student, but I don't remember. When I came back on the faculty, of course, there was a jump of like two or three years in between, and I don't really remember that. I know that there were some people there who really were down, tremendously, on Ropp. The fellow with the New York accent in the Math Dept. God, he was, Simon Moshowitz. Remember, Simon? He was. I picked him up a couple of times and give him a ride. He used to shout in you ear. I never had him as a lecturer.

Allen: And got out of the car-

Mike: With his briefcase,

Allen: And slammed the door and knocked the car over.

Mike: And he carried an open briefcase in each hand when he walked, and he was really violently, he was almost, I think, almost verged on pathologically anti-Ropp. I know he finally left and I think he went out to Long Island somewhere. Yes, what were

you going to say, Bill?

Allen: Remember the day he was unbalanced with only one briefcase?

Mike: No I don't, but I can understand it, because it was interesting, some of the peculiarities. I know that Ralph Pickett had the most unbelievable grading system. I think it was based on eighths or something, you know and I mean, good God. I always remember my wife, many years after our children were out, came back and she went over and took Western Civilization with Ralph. Loved the course, loved him and so forth. He was so orderly and all this kind of stuff, and I always remember, she took a final exam and she came out and she really thought she really blew it. and she come out and she said, Oh, that test was awful. She said, it was you just had to know every little nuance, the question would be, did such and such tribe dominate in Western Europe and you know you would have to understand what he meant by dominate, you know, and all this, it was a terrible exam. Well she said, he is going to post it in his office. O.K. look, Betty, I'll scoot over and get the grade whenever he posts it. So I went over and there was a sign that Ralph had been in an automobile accident and that he wouldn't be able to. I said to Harry, Harry was there, Kendall, I said Harry, what's the story with Ralph, is he alright. Harry said, he's alright but what's going to happen, I'm going to grade the exam. So I came back over, like a day later, I said, Harry, have you finished grading. Jesus, Mike, he said, keep this under your hat, I'll tell you the truth, he said, I took the things, he didn't have a key made out, He said, son of a bitch, I couldn't answer the questions, I didn't know what the answers were. So what I'm doing is I'm waiting and Ralph is going to put the answers down and then I'm going to grade them, I just couldn't figure out what the answers that he wanted were. I always thought that was kind of funny

Allen: I shared an office with Ralph for many years.

Mike: Yes, an interesting guy. I had a tremendous amount of respect for him. He would have been perfect, he was perfect with Ropp, because he, but morally and ethically, Ralph, I think, was a real sounding board. He was the only person, when I came here, he said to me, I, it was real interesting, Mike, he said, I'm going to tell you. One day the door opened in the office and it was when I was first i(?). He said, I've heard that you drove Dolan out and you forced Dolan out and so forth and I said no, Ralph, that's not true. I said, even as chairman, but I also want you to know that I also asked Chick whether or not he wanted to be the chairman, you know, because I would not take him if Chick Spiltoir wanted it, you know, because Chick said, no way did he want to be considered for the chairman. You know what Chick was like, and he said no, he just didn't want to do that and so I said alright, I know the situation. I said fine I would

accept this thing. And so I explained to Ralph what the situation was, and I told him (?) and I want you to consider this morally binding, because if you told Ralph this, Ralph was just not about to divulge or repeat anything. He said he felt much better. He later served on a committee for O'Neil-Butler. Remember the O'Neil-Butler case, and it was really interesting. Ralph and I were on it as the (?) for when they were breaking his contract or tenure or something, and apparently they had to have a committee there, and he had to be considered, and Ralph and myself were the faculty representatives and a lovely lady from the Board of Trustees, represented the Board of Trustees, and then Littlefield was there, O'Neil-Butler and two others were there. This was the group that met to consider this thing.

Allen: I've forgotton quite a bit about that. What was that over?

Mkke: Apparently, from what I understand, the chairman of the department, I don't even know his name, I can't even remember, apparently was gay, and they had O'Neil-Butler and him had some sort of a relationship which later, apparently, broke down and they started to really chop at each other, and O'Neil-Butler was finally brought up on moral grounds which was, I think, was the only way that you could, I mean other than failure to your capacity, but he and apparently either seduced or exposed himself to one of the woman students that we later discovered was a professional girl from down in New York anyway, so, but whatever, and this kind of an episode, and I remember this lady on the Board of Trustees, Oh, Oh, she was listening and she said I never knew!

Allen: Do you remember her name?

Mike: God, no, it's been so many years. You know I saw her twice and I don't think I knew her name when we were there, to be honest with you. But I remember Ralph and I, I don't know how I got on the thing, I think Ralph was, of course, I think Ralph morally was very very straight kind of individual, and I enjoyed him but, frankly, he did not have a good reputation studentwise. He was considered kind of a dry, so forth, and I remember Milton Milhauser. I can remember I got into an argument about him, concerning, when I was a student, concerning the Israeli right in Palestine, and so forth and so on, but he was a very interesting

Allen: Now we've hedged around Fran Dolan quite a bit.

Mkke: O.K. Fran, from what I understand, came here to the university in admissions. And then

Allen: As Bigsbee's assistant.

Mike: By the way, Earl was, I considered very very bright, a

very good man. He was very underated you know, but I think he was an outstanding individual. Certainly a good heart, desires of the best for the university, but in any event, I have no idea how long you want this to go.

Allen: Keep going.

Mike: When I came, actually, Fran wasn't even here when I was here as a student. Fran came at the time when I left to go into the service, and from what I understand, his credentials were initially supported by somebody on the Board of Trustees. I don't know who, and I never did really find out. Fran came in and then moved over from admissions, as I understand it, to the Biology Dept. where he, by that time the Dept. had gone down to Bill Everett, Chick Spiltoir and Fran Dolan, that whole group of people, Donovan, Pavalario, Akers and all these people had served during the time when I was here as a student, were gone and the student body, I guess the numbers had dropped, so the faculty in Biology was 3 and I think Harry Bandazian also used to help on a part time basis. The body was starting to come up at this time when the three of them were there, and they started and I was the first person hired, kind of with the upsweep in the numbers of students. Fran was a very agreeable, very pleasant individual. I think very polite. I think that he could have done well in just about any field. He only came, many years, especially after I come back with my doctorte. Bill Everett passed away, I'm not quite sure what the time was. It was in the early 60's. Fran Dolan was appointed to the chair, and that time there was only Dolan, Chick Spiltoir and myself on the faculty, and I always thought that he did a pretty good job. I realized afterwards, frankly, when I come back, that there was some awful gaps that I figured that he had just been trained so long ago. He always claimed that he had been to Fordham and for his Bachlors Degree and then got his doctorate from Goetingen. What really surprised me was, I spent a couple of years over in Germany, and I knew that the academic records had not been, Goetingen had never been bombed in the War, and he, of course, claimed that all the records had been destroyed, and he served as the chair and I think he served very ably, frankly, as the chair. Certainly he guided the department through, and I think his main failure was just not knowing how to approach technical grant writing, and I think that failure really hurt us later in terms of getting proper equipment, and, as I said before there was a lot of money available, but he hqd a very, very good rapport with the students and so forth, and he, of course, dropped down to just teaching. By the way, the first course I taught when I came back was Comparative Anatomy, which was one of the courses I said I didn't think I could teach, but he taught Anatomy, Physiology and Philosophy of Biology course, and this type of thing, and was pretty well received by the students. There were one or two students, a couple of really good students, who also tried the Physiology course which I guess was not too well received, but in

any event, I thought he did a decent job administratively. I think he weaved his way through. He was very, very good at talking and phenomenal memory for people. He could see somebody and remember these people, which is one of my weaknesses. That's why I call students by pet names. You know, "Bullet Head, Lead Bottom" because I just can't remember all the names and they start to mesh into each other after a while. They become types, but in any event I thought he did a very good job. He

Allen: He almost became Dean.

Mike: Yes, I know he put in an application for the deanship and so forth and so on, but I have no idea. I still have a feeling somewhere along the line, administratively, there was somebody that knew about him, and this is in thinking back. I have no real evidence about it, but I-

Allen: How was he unmasked?

Mike: Well, let me tell you what happened. It was really kind of an interesting thing. Fletcher, Don Fletcher was here as Dean. By the way, I think that Don, the main problem with Don Fletcher as Dean was, I think he had an inflated idea of the powers of deanship. And if he had been in administration, had been chairman before, and he came, and I think he thought that he could do things by kind of jamming them down people's throat and he learned that the faculty senate and so forth just grinds exceedingly slow, and the College of Arts and Sciences at that time had just so many diverse, Well you can't ride over. Ropp rode over the faculty, he just dominate the faculty, but at this time dissident voices were everywhere, and this and that and different views, and I think that he was very bright, very capable, Don Fletcher. But in any event, apparently there had been a problem with Garner in the Physics Dept. and at this time, from what I understand, somewhere along the line, was issued that everybody's credentials would be checked. Not only new people but the credentials of other people and I think particularly sensitive to chairman, I think not only with Garner, but I think somebody else, but whatever, I can't remember. I wasn't really, you know just at that time, you just didn't care. Garner, I knew, he was a personal friend of mine, but in any event, and I know what happened was, a letter was sent to Fordham at the time and the first thing I, Fran didn't even know about it. One day Fletcher popped in to my office, and said, How old is Fran Dolan. I said I think he was born in 1918 somewhere around 55 or so. Off he went. And apparently what had happened was he had sent to Fordham and they said there had been a Dolan, I can imagine that Fordham probably had had a lot of Dolans, but they said there had been a Francis Dolan, but that he had graduated, that would have made him like 67 or 68 years old, and this obviously was not Fran so at this point he later got a contact from Goettingen. Absolutely no record. Apparently at these schools, don't say, the

only thing they say is that you were admitted and that you were given a degree. They don't say much in between, you can find out if they were admitted, you don't get a degree, whatever. Anyway, they finally got information. He was surprised at that. Then, I can still remember, it was about 10 o'clock at night. I was at home and I got a telephone call. Fletcher. "Mike, my God", he said, "come over to my house". I said, "O.K. when do you want?" I thought he meant the next day. He said, "right away". I said, "right away?" it's ten o'clock at night and he said. "O.K. I can't talk to you, just come". So I went over and he had a very nice wife. She had cheese and some wine, so we were sitting there and he said, "Mike, I have a real problem". I said, "so". He said, "I discovered all of Dolan's credentials", he said, "everyone, right down the line, except that he apparently went to some mortician's school. You know, one of these embalming schools. Apparently everything is completely false. So I'll tell you", he said, "I'm going to tell him, advise him of this. What is going to be the department's position?". Apparently this was going to happen the next day. So he said, "what do you think the department is going to do?". Now this is the rest of the department, cause at that time there was myself, Chick and there was Hugo, John Polohowich and Mike Itori and a lot of others. There was like eight or nine people in the department. I said, "frankly, there's been some talk in the department wondering about credentials, especially with myself and people, but nobody bothered, and you didn't even think it was the kind of thing that you'd say, Jesus, I can't understand why or what, and so I said, 'I don't think, what's going to happen, were're not going to not teach or something, what can I tell you?'. He was quite agitated, very much upset about it, because I think Fran represented a pretty strong person on the campus. He had been on all sorts of committees, very well known on the campus, and he wasn't quite sure I think what was going to happen, legally with, as I say the students that had left and maybe flunked out, or whatever, and so from what I understand, the next day of course, he never really ever got. Fran resigned, the next day, and I mean, before Fletcher could talk to him, and I know that the only contact that I think he had was with Littlefield, and Fran was quite friendly with Littlefield's secretary. I think, and now this again is pure conjecture, I have a feeling that he was advised of this so that he could resign before, either deliberately by Littlefield, or under-cover by the secretary, or something, but I think he was advised, so the next day he came in and resigned, that was it, he was gone. Cleaned out the entire files, took every single piece of paper in the Biology Dept. out, and simply left, and that was it. I saw him about twice after that. The, but I know, frankly, that I'm very sure that Fletcher never got to speak to him, you know.

Allen: Are you sure this was Fletcher and not Miles?

Mike: This was Fletcher absolutely. I was there talking to him.

No, it was not Miles, it was Fletcher. I'm not even sure that Miles was back as president or not. No, it was Littlefield as the pres. And Fletcher was the Dean. And, course, it was just like the one, you know Fletcher was only here a year, and then after that it was Karnis or somebody like that, I can't remember who came, we had a succession. Larson, but in any event he that was the story and he just simply disappeared from the scene and then we had myself and Chick, were co-chairman of something or other. He asked the two of us if we would serve as a co-chair and which we did for like a semester, and then he wanted to bring a fellow in from California. He talked about a friend of his from Los Angeles coming in as the chairman, and what happened was of course, he tendered his resignation because of problems with Christie. He and Christie were having a real hassle. Christie was really down on him, and I know that he tendered his resignation which was accepted. Then Christie was killed, of course in the summer, and Christie, in the meantime, had pushed my chairmanship. Christie was the one that passed on me, but what happened was, he was killed and then Fletcher reapplied, to come back, as I understand it. Then what happened was, Littlefield found out that he had never resigned, he had been on a leave of absence, and of course Littlefield felt that this was not correct and, therefore, off he went and I can't even remember there was such a succession of people.

Allen: It gets a little confusing in my memory as well. Tell me about Miles as Dean.

Mike: I can't tell you a thing about Miles as Dean. I was not here, and the only thing I ever got from Miles was a letter asking me what my intentions were. He wanted me to state very clearly what my intentions were concerning coming back, and of course I was already up at Clark, and then I came back and I was teaching full time and finishing my dissertation, so I had very little contact with him at all, and then of course, the following year he was gone and Fletcher was in so, as Dean I know that the advent, I think he was in good force at the time, but everything, he had so many ideas of. academic ideas, that he pushed at the time, that we were precipitated into that graduate program with no real idea, at least in Biology, of what the hell was going on. One day we had a major, we didn't have any courses, we were creating courses left and right. I come bck, I was teaching a graduate course. It was amusing because we had at the time two PHD's and two masters. The two masters were teaching the graduate course and the PHD's weren't. it was really a strange thing, but I think the idea of getting strong chairs. His idea was to get strong academic chairs and let them control the dept. so this was alright, you know, but unfortunately came just at a time when the faculty liberalization was going on and caused, subsequent to Miles, a hell of a lot of conflict between dominant chairs and the faculty, and I think that a lot of the fighting that went on was based on this fear of strong chairs.

Allen: Certainly one of the strong chairs was Van der Kroef.

Mike: Well, Van der Kroef, if you are talking, when you are talking when you say strong, if you mean autocratic, yes. He certainly was, but there was other chairs that had concepts of Ekmetjian and Brady. Did he bring Schmidt in?

Allen: Miles brought Schmidt in.

Mike: Brought Schmidt in in History, and they brought somebody in English. Almost all of the chairs

Allen: Parsons in Philosophy.

Mike: I think he broght in some outstanding people. He paid them well, which was unheard of at the university, frankly, and I think he brought in some very, very good people, but they were certainly with the idea of strong autocratic chairs. Van der Kroef, I think, was probably the most autocratic of them, you know what I'm saying, but they all believed, I don't think we even have a chairman's council anymore.

Allen: We don't?

Mike: I don't think there is one. I didn't go to one. You know that kind of disappeared in the 70's at the latest. We used to go over there and, I thought, frankly, it was a good experience. But the chairs now are these rotating chairs and I don't really think, i still feel that the, I think that once the chairman goes maybe over five years sometimes it's better to get rid of him, to replace him, simply to get new ideas and things like that. I was here fifteen years, now that I'm not chairman, we should get rid of them, but I don't know, I mean this is. I can't see the student, I just don't think relate to somebody who's going to be here a year or two, and then somebody else, and somebody else, and I don't think the continuity builds up, but in any event, that's just my opinion. Certainly we can argue the other way just as well.

Allen: What is the greatest success of yours?

Mike: Probably, I think, teaching. Before I came here as the chairman, I had ten points that I thought I would like to do. And it's sad, because I think that we got to about nine of them and then the attrition just sort of sat in and we reached, I think, a peak in the department certainly in the very late 70's, early 80's and then it's been attrition. You know, we've been sitting like the Dutchman with my thumb in, the only trouble, I have ten fingers and there are eleven holes, and it's been that kind of a fight since then. The only point tht I didn't succeed in was the PHD program and we did present a PHD program and they

thought about it for like a year, and they never did never reject it, it sort of died, and by that time I felt that the resource at the university was such that it wasn't, what was the use of having another bad PHD program, better to stay with the master's degree, work on that and do a decent job there. So we never really pushed that. Lack of equipment was another one. Starting at the 70's, it has become increasingly a problem. We just need capital equipment. Faculty wise, I'm very pleased with the faculty, there's been tremendous changes. I think that, now we're having some problems, unfortunately, Hugo's inherited. Hugo James, you know is the chairman now, has inherited an attritic thing, we are getting to the point now where - certainly, my feeling is that tenure has to be broken. I don't think the university can survive unless they can do something. You have to reduce the working force selectively. If they are just going to drop the bottom, that's what happened to the History Dept., you know, but many of the people in the History Dept. one section is gone, American History, but the younger faculty is gone and you're left basically with Western Civ. even though you're in the Dept. which was, you know, not the area and I think this hurt. We have a situation where non tenured, and the last tenured person in Biology are in the one area that's really going pretty decently, so my going without selective breaking of tenure, you lose the continuity in the department.

Allen: If you had it to do all over again, would you?

Mike: Oh yes, as I said I wouldn't change a day. I've been, I had a good life. Still students come in (?) There might be an old decrepid body but the brain stays young and I love teaching especially since I've been away from (?) I always hear the old joke about the fellow who says, he's dead, isn't he, No he's the chairman and this is so true. I think that this year I really enjoyed teaching and I'm going to do nothing but now but teach and talk to students. I think this is my strength, this is what I like.

Allen: Well, we're getting very near the end of this side of the tape and I think we're also beginning to run a little bit shy of time. And our ideas. I thank you very much, Mike, at any time you think of anything else that you would like to add to this, please give me a call and if you come up with other interesting anecdotes which I can always use, we'll be happy to receive them.

Mike: Alright, Bill, it certainly is a pleasure talking to you, certainly it is something that's long overdue and as I told you before we started, the sad things is the materials that have gone down the drain, it's really sad. I don't think we ever had, did we ever any collection at all?

Allen: We have a few things in special collections.

Mike: I just said it wasn't done with tea leaves. I would think that Ropp certainly had a sense of this, I don't know what happened to all of his material when he left, but I know he had a lot of materials and things. Course they come down. I know they asked me if I wanted the files which I took from him, but they were all student files and tests and all that junk for like ever.

End of tape.